

## FROM CABINET TO COUCH: FREUD'S CLINICAL USE OF SCULPTURE

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**ABSTRACT** This article aims to address and remedy the fact that Freud's clinical use of sculpture has received little sustained attention. After a brief review of the collection, Melanie Klein's clinical use of dolls is discussed as an initial basis for comparison. It then makes a detailed examination of primary evidence found in the published writings and private correspondence of the writer and analysand H.D. (Hilda Doolittle). H.D.'s analysis indicates that Freud used sculpture as an analogue for the 'foreign body' of psychological trauma, treating it as a representation of a representation, or *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. The sculptures also served Freud's archaeological metaphor for the 'otherness' of the unconscious in ways that architectural fragments did not. The author then considers H.D.'s hallucination of Athena Nike and Freud's use of his own damaged sculpture of Athena to raise therapeutic questions about her phallic relation to the signifier in the treatment of her writer's block. This case study is further compared to Klein and to Jung in order to differentiate the use of objects in the clinical setting and to mark some of the limits Freud encountered in H.D.'s second analytic session. The author concludes that purely textual examinations of Freud may have greatly underestimated his clinical use of sculpture in recuperating lost memories as fundamental indices of desire.

*Key words:* Freud, sculpture, Hilda Doolittle, H.D., clinical setting.

In April 2006 an exhibition of Freud's collection of sculpture appeared at the Henry Moore Institute (Wood 2006) (Figure 1). While smaller than a 1990 show at the University of California, the curatorial novelty of this exhibition was the unique opportunity to sit in a facsimile of Freud's chair and look at a modest but well-chosen sampling of the collection on a desk-like plinth. Freud owned, at the time of his death, over 2000 sculptures, some of which he bought, some of which were gifts from supporters and analysands. He collected pots, bowls, rings, phallic amulets and animals, but the majority of the collection consisted of figurative sculpture, many of a mythological derivation (Gamwell & Wells 1989; Barker 1996) (see Figure 2). Their display on shelves, desk and in cabinets in the consulting room in Vienna and London suggests that they may have been an active part of the clinical experience. While as ever inviting aesthetic, art-historical and archaeological appreciation, one value of this exhibition's partial reconstruction of the clinical setting is that it allows questions to be raised about

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Fig. 1: Freud's Sculpture exhibition Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2006



Fig. 2: Freud's Collection of Sculpture in the Clinical Setting, Vienna, 1938



**Fig. 3: Toys Used by Melanie Klein (courtesy of the Melanie Klein Trust and the Wellcome Trust)**

how Freud used sculpture in analytic practice. If this is a topic that he rarely mentioned, there are a number of accounts of Freud using sculpture in analysis and it is interesting to think about this in comparison to Klein's use of dolls and Jung's use of sculpture and other arts. In order to aid this comparison, I would like to start off with some mention of Klein's use of dolls.

Klein initially used dolls to provide material for interpretation and diagnosis (see Figure 3):

I found it essential to have *small* toys because their number and variety enable children to express a wide range of fantasies and experiences. It is important that these toys should be non-mechanical and that the human figures, varying only in colour and size, should not indicate a particular occupation. (Klein 1955, p. 126)

Klein found that children most readily used the plainest of dolls as representations of objects of cathexis, of ego, mother, father and siblings. They allowed children to represent fantasies about these objects or, sometimes, to act as surrogates at a time when the object was not available. Klein used dolls to construct a picture of the causal motivations that lay behind the gratifications or frustrations expressed by the child's play scenario. Dolls in this sense illustrated the child's drives in terms of its need for other people. During or immediately after the play scenario interpretations were made that named the dolls: 'This is you, this is your father, your mother, your sibling'. The very plainness of the dolls invited a high level of fantasy from

the child and aided the therapeutic impact of the constructions because the general lack of representational attributes in the dolls made resistance to the analyst's construction more difficult (e.g. 'But you can't be right, this doll is a farmer and my father is a vicar'). Interpretation of play scenarios often left the child with a doll that was a self-representation and, in reference to this doll, Klein was able to raise questions with the child about good and bad self-object representations. Interestingly, a plain doll with relatively simple unsegmented external form was nevertheless most useful in explaining to the child his or her internally split or unintegrated motivations towards others. Additionally, the repair of dismembered or damaged dolls was an opportunity to rehearse the reparations of the depressive position. Doll play provided copious material from which to construct the analysand's cathexis with self and other objects. But, to what degree does Freud's use of sculpture compare to Klein's use of dolls?

Freud said remarkably little about his sculpture and he never claimed they were a direct part of clinical practice. While some have suggested that they are best understood in terms of his passion for collecting, or as an audience to his writing, or a way to impress visitors, I would like to suggest that they were an active part of the clinical process, and one that deserves attention given the fact that there are always objects in the clinical setting. The most detailed and eloquent records of their clinical use can be found in the private letters and published memoirs of the writer and poet, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), who first attended analysis in 1933. She came to Freud after developing 'writer's block' aggravated by the recent deaths of her father and brother, and several 'occult' experiences (neurotic hallucinations) that continued to perplex her. She was at odds with her ability to use signifiers to formulate signification (in the Lacanian sense that the unconscious is 'in the letter', not in the word), and was inclined to approach people through mythological characterizations to such a degree that she sometimes gave the impression of having a tenuous grasp on reality (Fink 2004). In her first experience of walking into Freud's consulting room she was so captivated by the sculptures that she initially did not notice Freud's presence. This, and later demonstrations of her capacity to take satisfaction from non-human objects such as signifiers, myths and sculptures, sat comfortably with Freud's theory that many kinds of object can make satisfaction possible.

In the early stages of analysis H.D. recounted a dream involving a Pharaoh's daughter finding a baby, which she connected to a lithograph from her family's illustrated Old Testament and to childhood memories of unsuccessfully seducing her astronomer father and older brother while holding onto a doll. Freud's interpretation did not turn the doll into a representation of an oedipal wish for a baby by her male family members. Instead, he asked her whether in her dream she was the baby. Was the dream, he asked, connected to her wish to start a new religion, to be Moses? H.D. and others have noted that this construction may have contained more than a little of Freud's own

wish, but this misses the greater point. For Freud, the child or doll in the dream was not a wish for a particular object relation, but a signifier of a wish, a representation of a representation of a wish. It is this 'double encoding' of the unconscious, if I may call it such, that Freud teaches H.D., and the lesson quickly changes her appreciation of the sculpture collection. The sculptures are no longer regarded as direct representations of wishes, but representations of representations of wishes. As she puts it, she has dreamt of a doll, but the point to attend to is this: what is the doll, as lost 'other', dreaming of?

The doll is the dream or the symbol of the dream of this particular child, as these various Ra, Nut, Hathor, Isis and Ka figures that are dimly apprehended on their shelves or on the Professor's table in the other room are the dream or the symbol of the dream of other aspiring or adoring souls. The childhood of the individual is the childhood of the race ... The child in me has gone ... yet it is not dead. (H.D. 1956, p. 38)

At this point in H.D.'s analysis the doll is not, as with Klein's dolls, a representation of an object, but what Freud called a *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, a representation of a representation or, as H.D. put it, a symbol of a dream. The sculptures were not direct representations of fantasy wishes, but legible representations of the existence of a lost memory of a motivation, a thought or wish that was, in itself, also ideogenic and therefore a representation.

In his *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud (1910) cites a pedagogically simple example of a contemporary Londoner who cries at the sight of Charing Cross, not in mourning of a long-lost queen, but because the sculptural object represented a repressed symbol. To Freud, in hysteria, the analysand notes symptoms, feels an affect, but cannot connect it to an underlying thought from a past event. The strangulation or repression was treated according to the principle of constancy, which called for the abreaction or discharge of the affect. It is worth noting, however, that in his first formulation of this theory he used a notable image for trauma. It was like a 'foreign body' that subsisted as an agency within the psyche:

But the central relation between the determining psychical trauma and the hysterical phenomenon is not of a kind implying that the trauma merely acts like an *agent provocateur* in releasing the symptom, which thereafter leads an independent existence. We must presume that the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work. (Freud 1893, p. 6)

If I quote this particular passage it is because, historically, the first formulation of this theory of neurotic trauma as an 'other' coincides (mid-1890s) with his first purchases of sculpture. Much as he later did with Charing Cross, this remark suggests that Freud was able to actively conceive of sculpture as an appropriate analogue for the 'foreign body' of psychical trauma. But

again, why use ancient Chinese, Egyptian and Greek sculpture rather than dolls? Was it because they had a size or material quality that added to his biological analogy for trauma, was it because Freud was fascinated by mythology, or was it because the sculptures were archaeological artefacts that had been excavated from the past?

Unlike Klein's dolls, Freud's sculptures were delicate archaeological artefacts and, as has been much noted, direct developments of his archaeological metaphor for psychoanalysis. The analyst digs into memory to find artefacts of lost events. As the analysis progressed, the status of the sculptures changed as H.D. took on Freud's archaeological metaphor for the investigation of lost memories. Writing of a later stage of the analysis she remarks that:

We travel far in thought, in imagination or in the realm of memory. Events happened as they happened, not all of them of course but here and there a memory or a fragment of a dream-picture is actual, is real, is like a work of art or is a work of art. I have spoken of the two scenes with my brother as remaining set apart, like transparencies in a dark room set before lighted candles. Those memories, visions, dreams, reveries – or what you will – are different. Their texture is different, the effect they have on mind and body is different. They are healing. They are real. They are as real in their dimension of length, breadth, thickness, as any of the bronze or marble or pottery or clay objects that fill the cases around the walls that are set in elegant precision in a wide arc on the Professor's table in the other room. But we cannot prove that they are real. We can discriminate as a connoisseur (as the Professor does with his priceless collection here) between the false and the true: a good copy of a rare object is not without value, but we must distinguish between a faithful copy and a spurious imitation; there are certain alloys too that may corrode and corrupt in time, and objects so blighted must be segregated or scrapped; there are priceless broken fragments that are meaningless until we find the other broken bits to match them. (H.D. 1956, p. 41)

In this quote sculptures are more than representations of the memory of a wish or a trauma, like a foreign body. In one sense she says that the realness of the sculptures are like the realness of memory, but also that they are like the realness of Freud's constructions of past events. The constructions may not be accurate in every historical detail, they might even be good reproductions, but close enough to induce a discharge. Freud's connoisseur's ability to spot a forgery in sculpture was a testament to his ability to spot false memories in the analysand and to spot a poor analytic construction.

For much of Freud's archaeological metaphor an architectural fragment sufficed (Freud 1937). But a sculpture might be acting to favour the recuperation of the analysand's 'other', rather than an event, that had wishes. In this sense, when H.D. speaks of damage, corrosion and blight, even beyond repair, she suggests something more than the irreparable loss of certain memories. She suggests that a sculpture, like the unconscious other itself, can

be damaged by a trauma so severe that it is beyond repair, that it can cease to participate, in H.D.'s case, in the production of signification.

In Freud's preliminary metaphor the sculptures represented an otherness, a foreign body within, which had left the analysand feeling misaligned, estranged, or taken over. In a different metaphor the sculptures were Freud's reconstructions of past events, like excavated memories. Yet, in a third sense, the damage to the material (bronze, stone, clay) of the sculpture was a metaphor for the loss of the power of the id to realize the purpose of the organism. It would seem that Freud prompted all three of these readings in this particular sequence. How, though, did Freud and H.D. come to select a single sculpture from the collection?

H.D. and Freud had a running joke about the misreading of a shipping note for his sculptures in which 'gods' was mistaken for 'goods', which alleviated her anxiety that she was permanently damaged goods. Around this joke, they were able to approach her most striking symptom, a hallucination based on an image of Athena Nike. She called this episode her 'writing on the wall', which occurred while recovering from severe illness (influenza complicated by double pneumonia) in Corfu. It formed the core of the first analysis, so much so that her memoirs were originally entitled *Writing on the Wall* and only changed to *Tribute to Freud* on the recommendation of her publisher. In the course of the hallucination, the 'writing' progressively varied from flattened silhouettes of objects to three-dimensional objects in perspective, some of which were static while others moved – at its most intense an Athena ascending a ladder – while the vision ended in a cryptic, inverted letter 'S'.

In this hallucination H.D. traversed many types of visual genre: pictographs, objects and writing. The spatial depth and associational complexity of the types built up only to end with the spatial flatness of a letter. The account of the whole episode runs to many pages, but in one instance she describes the culmination as such:

But fortunately the last figure to form does so, quickly; at least, there seems less strain and worry of waiting now. There she is, I call her she; I call her Niké, Victory. She is facing the wall or moving as against the wall up from the last rung of the ladder and she moves or floats swiftly enough. To my right, to her right on the space between the ladder and the mirror frame above the wash-stand, there is a series of broken curves ... The S or half-S faces the angel. (H.D. 1956, p. 54)

H.D.'s relation to writing, which had so liberated her in her youth and had come to so trouble her in her mid-40s, led to a vision that ended with a floating Athena and an inverted 'S', a sculpture next to a letter. While it was the letter that seemed to open up the gap that had become insurmountable, Freud's first responses was to select from his collection a small bronze sculpture of Athena (Figure 4). This is how H.D. related the event:





**Fig. 4: Athena, Bronze, 10.4 cm, Roman, FM 3007**

I did not always know if the Professor's excursions with me into the other room were by way of distraction, actual social occasions, or part of his plan. Did he want to find out how I would react to certain ideas embodied in these little statues, or how deeply I felt the dynamic idea still implicit in spite of the fact that ages or aeons of time had flown over many of them? Or did he mean simply to imply that he wanted to share his treasures with me, those tangible shapes before us that yet suggested the intangible and vastly more fascinating treasures of his own mind? Whatever his idea, I wanted then, as at other times, to meet him half-way; I wanted to return, in as unobtrusive a way as possible, the courtesy that was so subtly offered me. If it was a game, a sort of roundabout way of finding out something that perhaps my unconscious guard or censor was anxious to keep from him, well, I would do my best to play this game, this guessing game – or whatever it was ... It was a smallish object, judging by the place left empty, my end of the semicircle, made by the symmetrical arrangement of the Gods (or the goods) on his table. 'This is my favourite,' he said. He held the object toward me. I took it in my hand. It was a little bronze statue, helmeted, clothed to the foot in a carved robe with the upper incised chiton or peplum. One hand was extended as if holding a staff or rod. 'She is perfect,' he said, 'only she has lost her spear.' I did not say anything. (H.D. 1956, pp. 67–70)

H.D. was, as Freud knew, a great admirer of classical Greek civilization. He used this sculpture, including its mythological associations, to catch her at the level of her ideal ego. By way of a certain amount of tenuous, almost baiting interpretation he got her to project her ideal ego onto this sculpture as a way of restoring ego cathexis. The sculpture was a lure; the hook was fashioned by observing that the Athena had lost her spear, and baited by the construction



that it therefore had no penis. The issue of penis envy was raised by Freud as a challenge that initially led in the direction of a debate over what Athena held – spear, staff or rod, and the phallic nature of her bisexual ideal. The analysis drew her into a conception of her own perfection as a bisexual phallic woman who had lost her spear, the spear being her ability to write, her warrior instrument of signifier-making. Freud's analysis works out subtly in that acceptance *or* rejection of his penis envy theory (she did both) was likely to result in the same task being laid before her, the reformulation of an ego ideal that re-enamoured the unconscious and its battery of signifiers with her literary endeavours with words. At this point she was able to partially surmount her writer's block, certainly to the extent that Freud repeatedly prohibited H.D. from writing about her analysis. The short-term therapeutic benefit of this sculpture was so successful it is tempting to think that Freud selected the Athena for its lack of object, or even removed the object before showing it to her. If I raise this question, it is because the successful use of sculpture in the clinical situation may not be a simple one, and that Freud was quite notable in recognizing that a very large collection was required to find the right combination of qualities. The sculpture needed to be able to induce an effect of imaginary projection and an effect of symbolic introjection, and to do so in a psychical temporality that might be described as retroaction, in which the later effect comes to overwrite the former.

A comparison with Klein at this point may be apt. She recommended the use of dolls that had a plainness or lack of attributes because they invited a projection of repressed wishes. With H.D. Freud used the absence of an attribute, the empty hand of Athena, as a mark of a lack, either in being or of an object. As Lacan has put it, this lack is the very field in which the neurotic's passion is deployed. And in the course of the analysis the empty-handedness of the Athena is connected to the lack of signifiers coming from the unconscious that had previously existed in her writing as a source of unconscious pleasure. To continue the comparison, Freud's use of sculpture did take on aspects more familiar to Kleinian analysis. There were analytic moments in which the Athena prompted consideration of what H.D. had or had not introjected from her mother, as well as memories of her resentment that her mother had given gifts to others in the family rather than to her. The Athena was, like her mother, empty-handed, and through the antiquity of the sculpture H.D. remembered her introjection and cathexis with a grandmother who had given her gifts (Holland 2000).

Although H.D.'s sessions finished at this point, she returned to Freud 18 months later, in 1934, still perplexed by the finale of the Corfu vision, the backwards letter 'S', and its connection with a fear of violent masculine powers and disturbing premonitions of a second world war. As documented only in her letters, in this session Freud did not turn to a second sculpture to address her 'father-terror complex' (Friedman 2002, p. 479). As H.D.'s private correspondence attests, she developed a transference in which

Freud's relation to his sculptures gave him a paternal symbolic power of the gods, as if he were able to commune with their mysteries. H.D.'s second analysis lasted for five weeks, and in this time some headway was made in constructing an analysis of her bisexual relation to the masculinity of the letter. This second session may be of interest for the distinctions between sculpture-as-object and sculpture-as-signifier.

In the second analytic session the question of what the Athena sculpture held in her hand remained, but not because of a perpetuated ambivalence towards the mother, and not because this missing object was beyond interpretation, in what Charcot called the 'stigmata' of hysteria, the bodily, non-ideogenic, non-signifying aspect of a symptom that remained in a hermeneutic void (Reinhard 1996, p. 64). In the second analysis what mattered was the relation between this missing object and the masculinity of the backwards 'S' signifier as a function of her bisexuality. If the sculpture was initially effective in analysing her relation with her mother and grandmother, the question now moved to her relation to her father, who used an incomprehensible series of hieroglyph symbols in his work as an astronomer.

The analysis elicited a memory of a primal scene and a fear of gaps and space (associated with her father's astronomical hieroglyphs) and her according need to close these gaps and interpret the letter of the father. The Athena held a phallic spear/pen, and H.D.'s enjoyment in writing was not just a gift from her grandmother but an enjoyment she had learned from her father in imagining the function of his desire. This is a rich domain for a Lacanian interpretation, indicating the ways in which signifiers themselves may represent the enigmatic desire of the father, and H.D.'s attempts to retroactively figure out what the meaning and power of the signifier was, its insistent meaning. The case of H.D. both supports and augments Lacan's claim that Freud appreciated his sculptures 'at the level of the signifier' rather than 'a clear sense of what one called an object' (Lacan 1960, p. 113). It also suggests that H.D.'s repossession of a phallic function in the symbolic also brought her face to face with the pure terror of the phallus in the Real that she found in the primal scene and in reality in the Nazi movement of 1934.

The final analytic sessions also addressed the ongoing task of sublimation. It is interesting to examine this post-analytic period partly because her solution to the challenge of sublimation has so many Jungian characteristics in its therapeutic use of art. Ten years after leaving analysis, H.D.'s writings relate a resentment of Freud's use of sculpture as a representation of a representation of a wish lost in childhood. In the poem 'The Master', c. 1944, objects such as the sculpture of Athena no longer have anything to do with childhood traumas. It came to represent a lesbian perfection that excluded men and had its own power over the whole earth. H.D.'s response to Freud's request that she 'find a way to sublimate' was to pursue a liberating participation in a distinctly feminine drive that arose directly from an impersonal psychical substance. It is in H.D.'s pursuit of a *Lebensphilosophie* oneness

between self and world (an urge often advocated by Henri Bergson and members of the Imagist movement of which H.D. was a part) that some comparison of Freud's clinical use of sculpture might be made to Jung's clinical use of art.

Carl Gustav Jung was regularly critical of Freud's examinations of art and, by implication, his use of art in clinical practice (Jung 1923). Jung's wide-ranging use of art, for example, in *The Psychology of the Unconscious*, included sculptures, images, myths and poetry as illustrations of his theory of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Jung's use of the archaeological metaphor was quite different from Freud's, and so too was the clinical use of sculpture. Jung often used his collection to provide a basis on which a conflicted unconscious might be integrated. His theory of schizophrenia posited an unconscious at odds with itself because multiple emanations of a single biological drive lacked an integrated unity. Jung used art in clinical practice largely to lead schizophrenics to unified, balanced self, which led to the formation of relations with external love objects. H.D. seems to have eventually used the Athena sculpture, like Jung, as an objective exterior representation of an essential drive that, contrary to Freud, was independent of the childhood traumas that determine object, aim and source. Ancient sculpture was meant to reference a pre-personal unconscious below the id, and not just to conjure specific historical experiences that had become lost to memory. Jung used sculpture and other arts to place the analysand in pre-constructed typology or systematic phenomenology, something that Freud boasted that he never did (Freud 1937, p. 262).

While sculptures and other art forms were clinically useful to Jung in the process of constructing an analysis, they could also tip in the direction of reinforcing a delusion. Constructions and delusions share many of the same characteristics, in that both replace a fragment of reality that has been disavowed, and both are convincing because they contain more than an element of historical truth. Freud's arrangement of his collection is indicative in this sense. As in the Henry Moore Institute exhibit they remained aligned on shelves more like potential signifiers, their relation one to the next remaining intentionally ambiguous, arranged neither by date, theme nor geographic origin, while Jung categorized his collection into a typology of archetypes that predetermined their meaning much more forcefully. This may have been due to the way in which Jung, in making interpretive constructions for schizophrenics, had to deal with their tendencies to construct their own delusional explanations for events. Freud, in treating neurosis, was able to more subtly hide his strategy behind a connoisseurship whereas Jung made his explicit through a predetermined typology in order to successfully compete with very similar processes in psychosis.

Many of the differences in the clinical use of sculpture (as broadly defined) between Freud, Klein and Jung are consistent with differences in theory. Klein allowed the analysand to choose among plain dolls, the better

to represent transference phenomena that were the externalization of immediate internal events such as their motivating drives for other human beings. Dolls were used primarily to stand in for external objects in order that the analysand should come to recognize their projections, and to modify them before introjection back into the doll of self-representation. Freud's sculptures were not so blank; he needed many in order to select the one that represented the representation, and kept them on display to help in his process of selection and to pique the analysand's desire to discover the dream of their sculptural 'other'. If Lacan's generalization about the primarily symbolic function of the sculptures is of considerable critical value, it is nevertheless clear that Freud was not wholly distrustful of the initial seductiveness of sculpture as imaginary object. It would seem that the sculptures served as a basis on which to recover lost memories as a fundamental index of desire, and then again as a way to move therapeutically from matters projective and imaginary to matters introjective and symbolic.

In this respect, the particular case of the later H.D. raises issues that may serve as something of a critique of Freud's clinical practice. What he collected, in a sense, was a 'miniature' of the human figure, a reduction of scale that largely prevented the pieces, either individually or collectively, from referencing the Real. It would seem that she tired of Freud's contemplations of what the miniature of Athena had in her hand and his promptings towards the phallic pen as an answer to what guaranteed enjoyment in the Symbolic. Ultimately for H.D. Freud was right: Athena was perfect, she wasn't missing anything. The Athena in the hallucination was juxtaposed with the enigmatic fractured signifiers that, in her view, hailed an outcome in which the sculptural figure and the signifier collapsed together in a way such that the question of her authorial drive wasn't a matter of *having* the phallus in the Symbolic, it was a question of *being* it in the Real.

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